Or George Blahun from Connecticut who entered the military in 1940 to serve his country because of the impending war. He served over 35 years during World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. He is 100% disabled because of injuries incurred while performing military service. He asks that Congress stop giving veterans the ''arbitrary bureaucratic rhetorical nonsense'' and truly support this legislation. We must demonstrate to these veterans that we are thankful for their dedicated service. As such, we must fight for the amendment in the Senate version of the national defense authorization bill for FY 2001.

This is an absolute injustice to our career military retired veterans. Federal employees, for example a member of Congress or a staffer here on Capital Hill or an employee from the Department of Engery, are not penalized if they receive disability benefits. While career military men and women that have incurred injuries while in the line of duty are prohibited from doing so because of an archaic, out-dated 109-year-old law.

The amendment in the Senate bill represents an honest attempt to correct this inequity that has existed for far too long. Allowing disabled veterans to receive military retired pay and veterans disability compensation concurrently will restore fairness to the entire Federal retirement policy.

It is unfair for our veterans not to receive both of these payments concurrently. We must ensure that our veterans who are facing serious disabilities as a result of injuries sustained during their service do not have to choose between retirement pay and losing a portion of their disability benefits.

We have an opportunity to show our gratitude to these remarkable 437,000 disabled military men and women who have scarified so much for this great country of ours.

We are currently losing over one thousand WWII veterans each day. Every day we delay acting on this inequity means that we have denied fundamental fairness to thousands of men and women.

The Senate passed this provision by unanimous consent and the House companion bill, H.R. 303 from Congressman BILIRAKIS has 314 cosponsors. Our veterans have earned this and now it is our chance to honor their service to our nation. Freedom isn't free—and this is a small cost to the Federal government given the immeasurable sacrifices made by these dedicated Americans.

SPACE TRANSPORTATION

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I rise today with two purposes in mind. The first is to compliment the men and women who labor on behalf of the nation at the George C. Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama on the occasion of Marshall's 40th Anniversary. My second purpose is to share some thoughts on the importance of Space Transportation in light of the VA/HUD Appropriations Bill that will come before this body in the not too distant future. These two issues are inextricably linked in that Marshall Space Flight Center is the world leader in space transportation yet ever dependent on the funding that the VA/HUD appropriators provide. For that reason, I compliment Senator KIT BOND, and his superlative staff in advance of the bill being debated for all they continue to do on behalf of NASA and the nation. Their foresight will ultimately make the difference as we continue to move forward as a nation of explorers.

In September, 1960 President Dwight Eisenhower dedicated the Marshall Space Flight Center which soon began making history under the mentorship and direction of Dr. Wernher von Braun. From the Mercury-Redstone vehicle that placed America's first astronaut, Alan B. Shepard, into sub-orbital space in 1961, to the mammoth Saturn V rocket that launched humans to the moon in 1969, Marshall and its industry partners have successfully engineered history making projects that gave, and continue to give, America the world's premier space program.

We in Alabama and across America have so much to be thankful for and in a small way Marshall and its scientists, engineers and support personnel have carved out a niche of excellence that brought history to the community, state and nation. From Skylab, to the space shuttle to the lunar roving vehicle, America has looked to Marshall for experience and leadership. They were the right stuff, and they continue today to be the best with over 30 world-class facilities and test facilities. As NASA's Center of Excellence for Space Propulsion the men and women of Marshall are not simply dreamers of what may be, but are working hard in research and development to provide the propulsion systems that will enable NASA to provide the nation safe, reliable, low-cost access to space, rapid interplanetary transportation, and the hope of exploration beyond the solar system. This is not folly, Mr. President, this is reality.

These initiatives require us to make new investments in Space Transportation and this is what I believe Senator BOND and his committee are trying to do. Investments are being made and must continue to be made in the years to come in the Space Launch Initiative, the Third Generation technology program, and in Shuttle upgrades if we are going to achieve our collective space destiny.

I would like to take a few moments today to discuss these initiatives and the promise they hold for our country. I would also like to talk about some of the technology spin-offs these investments will yield for other parts of our economy.

The Space Launch Initiative is intended to dramatically reduce the cost of access to space by an order of magnitude over the next 10 years and to increase the reliability of space launch vehicles.

This initiative will result in the creation of a ''highway to space'' that will enable increased commercial activity in Earth orbit and beyond. The impact for our nation's economy will be dramatic, I believe. We need only to look at the past to understand the possibilities associated with opening new frontiers. Throughout our history, commerce and growth have been fueled when boundaries have been pushed back.

Let me briefly describe the elements and the purpose of NASA's Space Launch Initiative. The Space Shuttle remains the world's only reusable launch vehicle and continues to be a workhorse for NASA and the American public. You may have been watching the recent activities in space surrounding STS–106 (which landed this morning in Florida), our first shuttle mission to the International Space Station since the arrival of its newest component, the Russian supplied service module—Zvezda. The Shuttle is the first generation of reusable launch systems, but it has its faults and we must improve on this system. It is a very expensive system to operate and requires thousands of people and months of work to prepare the system for launch. In order to meet the goals of the Space Launch Initiative, NASA and its partners must develop systems that only require around 100 people and about one week for turnaround.

The Space Launch Initiative will focus on reducing technical and programmatic risks as well as the business risks associated with the development of new space launch technologies. While the goal will be to develop a Second Generation Reusable Launch Vehicle that increases crew safety by a factor of 10 and decreases cost by the same amount, the technology we develop along the way will only serve to enrich the economy. Let me provide an example—its NASA's X–33 program.

The X–33 is a sub-scale flight demonstrator designed to test many technologies that will drive a full-scale Second Generation vehicle. Like many developmental programs, the X–33 has had its share of setbacks. However, even with setbacks the X–33 program has actually spun off technology that will improve the lives of many newborn children.

Let me explain. The X–33's original composite tank contained fiber optic sensing technology embedded along the edge to monitor the health of the system. Realizing the potential of this

technology could be far reaching, NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center partnered with Dr. Jason Collins of the Pregnancy Institute in Slidell, Louisiana and with Prism, a San Antonio manufacturer of medical products, to improve obstetric forceps used to position an infant in the mother's womb prior to delivery, and in some cases used to assist with the delivery. Obstetrical forceps have been in use for over 300 years with more than 700 variations of the design, however, none of these allowed the physician to assess the force the instrument placed on the infant. An improvement was definitely needed that would minimize the risk to newborns delivered by forceps. NASA's solution: forceps made of polymeric material which flexes under pressure with fiber optic sensors from the X–33 program embedded in the material during the manufacturing process that indicate strain.

It is predicted that the fiber optic forceps will reduce the number of cesarean section deliveries, reduce the risk of injury to the mother, and significantly lower the occurrence of fetal injury caused by ordinary forceps, thus reducing overall health care costs.

Another part of the Space Launch Initiative is a program called the Alternate Access to the Space Station. This is an extremely important part of the Initiative for several reasons. The Alternate Access to Space Station effort will provide our country with more than one way service to the Space Station. As you may recall, Mr. President, in the aftermath of the Challenger disaster, the Shuttle program was down for several years. However, once the International Space Station is on orbit with a permanent crew on board, we cannot afford to face a time in which the Shuttle or any one launch vehicle is out of service for an extended period of time.

We must have a very robust method of keeping the Station re-supplied. We cannot afford to be tied to one or even two launch systems, but must have access to several launch vehicles. The Alternate Access program is designed to develop some of the most innovative launch vehicle concepts that exist today in industry for the purpose of providing resupply capability to the Station. This effort will give many up-and-coming aerospace companies and entrepreneurs the ability to break into the market by using NASA's requirements as the baseline on which to build their business case and attract investors.

While the Space Launch Initiative is designed to reduce the cost of access to space from $10,000 a pound to $1,000 a pound, in order to make space travel truly routine for the average citizen, we must do more. NASA is also planning to invest in Third Generation technologies to further reduce the cost of putting a pound of payload in orbit. The goal of the Third Generation activities is to get launch costs down to $100 a pound within 25 years. At that point, routine access to space for a variety of activities will become possible.

NASA's Third Generation program has been dubbed Spaceliner 100—the idea being that the technology advancements would result in a launch vehicle with commercial airliner reliability and again, a cost of around $100 a pound for launch. I was pleased last year to jump-start this investment. In a bipartisan effort, I along with Majority Leader TRENT LOTT, Senators SHELBY, BREAUX, LANDRIEU, VOINOVICH, DEWINE, and COCHRAN pressed for the inclusion of $80 million dollars in the FY 00 VA–HUD bill for Spaceliner 100.

I am glad to see that this action did not go unnoticed by the Administration. In this year's FY 2001 budget submission, the White House included $1.2 Billion for NASA's Third Generation effort over the next five years. This funding will support research in earth-to-orbit, in-space, and interstellar transportation technologies.

Earlier in my comments, I mentioned the Space Shuttle and the tremendous contribution it has made and will continue to make to our nation's space program. As we move towards these advanced launch vehicles, NASA must not take their eye off of the launch vehicle we depend on today. I am pleased to see that this is not the case, in fact the agency is taking steps to ensure that the Shuttle continues to be a robust vehicle. In fact, NASA is actually advocating upgrades for the Shuttle and the Administration proposed to spend $1.4 Billion dollars over five years in upgrades to the Shuttle. However, in light of the investments in Second and Third Generation technologies, you might wonder if Shuttle upgrades are worth it. The answer is yes and here's why:

First, we are dealing with a crew safety issue. Today the Shuttle performs on the edge of its capabilities. Statistically speaking, the Shuttle system will encounter a catastrophic failure once in every 450 launches. However, with the proposed upgrades, the Shuttle would have a much better safety margin.

With the upgrades, for every launch of the Shuttle, the catastrophic failure rate would be one in every 1,000 launches. Although this is not even close to the one in 2 million safety margin we enjoy on commercial airliners, it is a vast improvement. And when you are dealing with human lives, every little bit helps.

Second, every upgrade proposed for the Shuttle will be a candidate for use on Second Generation systems. In other words, not only is NASA improving safety for Shuttle crews, they are getting the opportunity to ''road test'' many new technologies.

I have briefly described NASA's Space Launch Initiative as well as the Agency's Third Generation efforts. I have provided an example or two of spin off technologies we are receiving and will continue to receive from this significant investment. These efforts are important to our nation's economic future as well as our continued National security. I believe these efforts will amount to a defining moment in our nation's space program in the day's ahead.

I am proud of the lead role NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama is taking in these efforts. But as anyone at Marshall will tell you, this will take the combined efforts of many of NASA's other Field Centers, along with the full participation of America's aerospace industry, and the help of many academic partners.

I began my remarks today by describing the 40 year effort at Marshall and the hard work that we have witnessed by Senator BOND's committee. We should not be lured into a false sense of security that we will always have the talent in our field centers we have today, or the great support we enjoy from the authorization and appropriations committees. As we look into the future, access to space will be as important to us as civil aviation is today. However, we all have a lot of work ahead of us, and this is an endeavor we must educated ourselves on and monitor closely that it doesn't stray off course. There is simply too much at stake to allow that to happen.

In the mid-1970's, the U.S. dominated the worldwide commercial space launch market. Today, we launch only 30 percent of the world's commercial payloads. Our re-emergence into the commercial market place will depend on bold investments, and on the boldness of our leaders who wish for America to remain a Nation of Explorers.

I urge my colleagues therefore to study carefully the upcoming NASA appropriation bill and suggest to them that they support the VA/HUD Appropriations Bill, and the investments in the Space Launch Initiative, Third Generation technologies, and Shuttle upgrades. These investments will truly be the keys to our future success in space and in the future global marketplace.

They also guarantee that the men and woman at the George C. Marshall Space Center have the tools to unlock the technological mysteries that lie before us, and in doing so make planet Earth a better place to live.

NORTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR JIM HUNT ON EDUCATION REFORM—VOUCHERS ARE THE WRONG ANSWER

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, one of our top priorities in Congress is to improve public schools for all students—by reducing class size, improving training and support for teachers, expanding